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ABSTRACT

This presentation describes a collaborative distance education project between the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Caribbean Labor Administration Center (CLAC) which resulted in CLAC using the UWI Distance Teaching Enterprise (UWIDITE) network to offer a training course for labor administrators in the Caribbean region. In addition, UWI offered a one year fulltime certificate course in Labor Administration. Three different courses were offered by CLAC over 3 years: Labor Inspection; Employment Service Operations; and Conciliation Methods and Techniques. This presentation begins by providing background information on the 21 countries served by CLAC. It then addresses the need for training of labor administrators; CLAC's partnership with the University of West Indies; UWIDITE--a telecommunications network consisting of slow scan television, telewriter, and teleconferencing facilities; the comparative cost of these distance courses and the traditional seminar format; and technical preparation for the use of UWIDITE. A recounting of some of the experiences of the CLAC with distance education courses concludes the paper. (ALF)

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THE APPLICATION OF DISTANCE TEACHING TO TRAINING IN LABOUR ADMINISTRATION: THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE

- BY A. N. LESLIE

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean sea occupies an area of 1,943,000 sq. km. (750,000 sq. mls.) which is roughly delineated by Central America on the West, Northern South America on the South and a chain of islands extending from Cuba, in an approximate semi-circle along its Northern and eastern reaches, to Trinidad in the south thereby dividing it from the Atlantic Ocean. The native languages of the countries washed by the Caribbean sea are Dutch, English, French and Spanish. The Caribbean Labour Administration Centre (CLAC) serves twenty-one of the countries in this general geographical locality. Three (Aruba, Netherland Antilles and Suriname) are Dutch-speaking, the others are English-speaking. Although for most practical purposes all the countries which it serves are regarded as constituting the Caribbean region, some of them in fact lie outside the Caribbean sea. These are the Bahamas, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Guyana, Suriname (these two are on the mainland of South America) and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The table below lists the countries which are served by CLAC and gives the area, the total population and the Gross Domestic Product of each.

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LIST OF COUNTRIES SERVED BY CLAC

Countries	Country size (Km 2)	Population (000')	GDP per capita (1990) US $
Anguilla	91	8.5 (1990)	5,906
Antigua and Barbuda	442	84.0 (1990)	4,985
Aruba	193	62.3 (1989)	9,794 *
Bahamas	13,939	253.3 (1990)	10,565
Barbados	431	257.9 (1990)	6,683
Belize	22,963	184.9 (1990)	1,973
Bermuda	53	59.0 (1989)	21,190 *
British Virgin Islands	153	16.6 (1990)	9,946
Cayman Islands	260	27.3 (1990)	26,320
Dominica	751	71.8 (1991)	2,049
Grenada	344	100.2 (1990)	2,000
Guyana	216,000	754.4 (1990)	340
Jamaica	11,424	2,403.0 (1990)	1,631
Montserrat	102	12.0 (1990)	6,133
Netherland Antilles	800	190.0 (1989)	8,579 *
St. Kitts and Nevis	267	43.0 (1990)	3,559
St. Lucia	616	151.3 (1990)	2,414
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	389	118.0 (1990)	1,620
Suriname	163,820	402.0 (1989)	2,399 *
Trinidad and Tobago	5,128	1,234.4 (1990)	4,127
Turks and Caicos Islands	430	12.4 (1990)	5,669

Note: * = GNP per capita

There are substantial distances between some of the countries and inter-island travel is not always easy or speedy. Nassau, the capital of the Bahamas, is 950 miles from Belize city. Belize, on the mainland of Central America, is 1,800 miles from Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. There are no direct flights between any of the countries and Belize, the Bahamas or Bermuda. Flight arrangements in and out of Suriname are such that two working days there could involve a mission of one week. Again a trip from Jamaica to Trinidad, from

the time of check-in to completion of customs formalities on arrival will often occupy as much as seven hours.

Notwithstanding the differences in area and population and the fact that they each have their own peculiar needs, there is a large measure of common ground between the countries of this sub-region. Eleven of the thirteen independent states are members of the ILO, all share a common concern for improvements in their system of labour administration, notwithstanding that the legislative underpinning is based on English law on the one hand, and Dutch law on the other. These commonalities make possible an aggregation of efforts in training aimed at improvements in the institutional capabilities and at reasonably manageable costs.

The size of the Labour Ministries and Departments vary significantly. In the vast majority of cases it would not be economical to execute national training programmes designed to increase the level of skill in particular aspects of labour administration. That is why by far the greater number of training activities organised by CLAC are either regional - for labour administrators from most or all the countries which it serves - or sub-regional, limited for instance to the seven members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS).

THE NEED FOR THE TRAINING OF LABOUR ADMINISTRATORS

Before the establishment of the Caribbean Labour Administration Centre (CLAC) towards the end of 1978, there was no formal arrangement for the systematic training of the labour administrators of the Caribbean area. Some training was offered from as early as the nineteen fifties by the United Kingdowm Government in its by-annual (later annual) course for labour officers from the Commonwealth but the number admitted from the Caribbean was necessarily very limited - one or two and occasionally three per year. (In the last few years only an

advanced course is being offered. Participation by Caribbean labour administrators is even more limited). On the other hand the staff turnover in Labour Ministries/Departments has been consistently high, particularly from the nineteen sixties onwards when a number of the countries (thirteen so far) began gaining independence and private and public sector growth tended to accelerate.

During the first half of the nineteen seventies, the Labour Ministers, following the succes of a small number of internationally-sponsored training exercises, pressed the ILO to put the training of Caribbean labour administrators on a permanent basis as had been done in other parts of the world. As a result of these representations the Caribbean Labour Administration Centre (CLAC) was established in 1978 - initially as a Focal Point of the Inter-American Labour Administration Centre (CIAT).

The broad objectives of the Centre is institution building. It seeks to assist the national labour administration institutions to improve their capabilities and increase their effectiveness. It is primarily concerned with assisting in the identification of staff training and development needs, the promotion of training activities and the provision of technical advisory services either from its own resources or from elsewhere as circumstances permit. In carrying out these activities it draws on local and regional resources in personnel and training institutions and, whereever possible and appropriate, incorporates TCDC arrangements.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Initially the Centre relied entirely on seminars, workshops, national training programmes and attachments as its means of training. However, in its search for ways and means of increasing the training opportunities within the region for labour

administrators, discussions were started with the University of the West Indies (UWI) (one of only two surviving regional universities - the other being the University of the South Pacific), in an endeavour to determine how the Centre and the University might collaborate in the provision of job-specific training in the field of labour administration. The response of the University (which is always keen to do all it can to expand its outreach activities) w very positive indeed.

At the time that the approach was made to the University, that institution had already established the feasibility of interactive distance teaching and teleconferencing and was infact in the midst of implementing a three year programme. The outcome of the discussions was a one year full-time Certificate Course in Labour Administration and an arrangement whereby CLAC would make use of the UWI Distance Teaching Enterprise (UWIDITE) on Saturdays during the summer recess to offer an additional training course. Both programmes came on stream in 1985 but it is with the latter that this paper is concerned.

There were two primary reasons to select Saturdays during the summer recess. One was that the University itself was by then making extensive use of the facilities during week days in term-time to offer some of its degree courses. The second reason arose out of the staff condition in many of the Labour Ministries and Departments. In order to allow the maximum number of officials in any given speciality to participate in a course dealing with that speciality, it had to be arranged at a time when official duties would not be adversely affected by the withdrawal from the office of a number of officials at the same time. A third reason, of perhaps lesser importance, was that Saturday sessions made it possible for officials from nearby islands to travel to a UWIDITE site and back on week-ends without inconveniencing their offices.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
DISTANCE TEACHING ENTERPRISE (UWIDITE)

The (UWIDITE) network makes use of the normal commercial telecommunications facilities. This means that the signals travel via telephone lines, microwave circuits, satellite ground stations, INTELSTAT satellite and tropospheric scatter. The equipment consists of Pulsecom telephone termination equipment, Darome Teleconferencing equipment and telephone hand set, slow scan television, video cassette recording and playback facilities and telewriters.

The slow scan television is used to transmit and receive still images. A video camera scans a scene (e.g. a diagram, a chart, participants in a room) which is then 'frozen," digitised and stored in the memory of a microprocessor. The signal is converted to audio tones which are then transmitted to the receiving stations where they are stored and re-converted to visual images on a video monitor.

The telewriter is used like the traditional chalkboard (blackboard). Each unit consists of a pad with a special pen for writing, a microprocessor and a video monitor. As the pad is written on the image it is digitised and transmitted simultanbeously to all the sites.

Simply put, the teleconferencing facilities enables participants assembled at sites all over the region to take part in a discussion or listen to a presentation as if they were all seated in the same room. What is more, someone operating from outside the region (e.g. Canada or the U.S.A.) can be "bridged" into the facility as a resource person or as a participant. However, in this case such a person would not be able to make use of either the slow scan television or the telewriter.

The great advantage of this method of course delivery is that it enables the labour administrator to participate from his home base. This is in contrast to a seminar which would have required him to travel to some pre-selected location in a different country from his own, in all but one or two cases, and to remain there for a pre-determined number of days. Another major advantage is that it allows very many more persons from an individual country to participate in the training exercise than would otherwise have been the case.

All the courses which have been offered so far by distance teaching since 1985 have been divided into either nine or twelve sessions, each of three hours duration. These sessions were held once per week on Saturday mornings. In the last three years they have been tripartite in composition. The teaching methodology consisted of short periods (ten to fifteen minutes) of lecture intersperced with questions, comments and discussions. In addition. there were "off line" group work followed by "on line" reporting and discussions in "plenary"

COMPARATIVE COST

The distance teaching method employed by CLAC eliminates two major elements of cost which would otherwise accrue. These are airfares and daily subsistence allowances. The other costs are common to both methods - for example the cost of teaching materials. If, for example, twelve sessions were condensed into a seminar, it would have occupied a participant for at least seven days including travel time. (An additional day or two might be required in a few cases - depending on flight schedules). In other words, a twelve session course which makes use of the distant teaching facilities saves, among other costs, seven days DSA per person. This is counter-balanced of course by the charge which the

University makes for the use of its facilities. This cost consists of an hourly amount for the use of the equipment, lecturers fees, the fee of the external co-ordinator and an amount to cover miscellaneous expenses.

The table below shows the per capita cost of courses conducted over the last three years with the use of the University of the West Indies Distance Teaching Enterprise in comparison with what the per capita cost would be if the course were condensed into a seminar in a country of the region where the rate of DSA was the lowest in each of the selected years. The comparison is between the costs which were specific to the distance teaching method used and the amount of DSA saved by not following the route of a seminar. It will be seen that the saving is substantial - even when the airfares which would be incidental to seminars are excluded from the comparison. The significant increase in the number of participants over the three year period probably reflects the popularity of the respective courses and the increase in the number of sites from which they could take part.

PARTICIPATION IN AND COMPARATIVE PER CAPITA COST OF DISTANCE TEACHING COURSE 1990 TO 1992

YEAR	1990	1991	1992
Topic	Labour Inspection	Employment Service Operations	Conciliation Methods and Techniques
Date	21st July - 15th September (9 weeks)	27th July - 12th October (12 weeks)	18th July - 3rd October (12 weeks)
Frequency	Saturdy morning (3 hour sessions)	Saturday morning (3 hour sessions)	Saturday morning (3 hour sessions)
Number of participants	55	71	100
Level of attendance	73 % *	85 % **	62 % **
Total expenditure	US$9,005	US$12,435	US$24,737
Costs per participant	US$ 163	US$ 175	US$ 247
Comparative cost for Seminar	US$ 505	505 US $	US$ 485

* present at six or more of the nine sessions.
** present at nine or more of the twelve sessions.

TECHNICAL PREPARTION FOR THE USE OF UWIDITE

The major disadvantage in the use of the distance teaching method is that there is no face to face contact between the lectures or resource person and the majority of the participants. This contact occurs only at the site from which the lecturer is operating. He is therefore unable easily to detect inattention. A participant could fall asleep without the lecturer knowing! A number of techniques has to be adopted to counter possible boredom and inattention.

The basic approach is to aim for a high level of interaction. To this end, the reading material (texts) and the supporting notes

prepared by the lecturer should reach the participants well in advance of the relevant session so as to allow them to prepare adequately. Secondly, the lecturer should avoid reading from his notes to the maximum extent possible. Instead, he should seek to spend the time in discussion, amplification and the provision of real life examples, where possible, to illustrate particular points. A third complementary approach is the use of group work. This involves the participants going "off line" to undertake a specific short, group assignment and then resuming "on line" to report and discuss the results. Another technique which is used is inter-site role-play. For example a participant at one site could act the part of a stubborn employer whom another participant from another site, acting as a labour inspector, is persuading to introduce a specific safety measure. Participants at all the sites would then be required to comment critically on the encounter. The foregoing are some of the ways in which interest can be maintained at the sessions. Of course others can be found; for example periodically, different participants at different sites may be asked, by name, at intervals for views or comments on a particular point made just before the request is made.

The actual preparation of the lectures has to be carefully done. Frequent references to real like experiences can add flavour and highten interest. In the presentation, systematic re-capitulation of the point as made from time to time throughout the session helps the learning process.

SOME EXPERIENCES OF CLAC

The final session of each course is always devoted in part to evaluation. In general participants are required to say what they had hoped to gain from the course, whether their expectations were met, what they liked or disliked most about it and what suggestions they may have for changes and improvements. When distance teaching was first employed by CLAC in 1985, perhaps the strongest proposal

for change was that the sessions should be conducted on a day other than Saturday. "Complaint" on this score has now ceased completely.

In the early stages, most frequent suggestions for improvement sought to have a wider range of labour administration topics included. In recent times this has tended to resolve itself into proposals or suggestions for changes in the teaching methodology. Requests for more case studies to be used has been gaining prominence. This implies a greater measure of "off line" group work and "online" presentation and discussion. This might suggest that participants are in search of an even higher level of interaction than has so far been characteristic of the sessions.

As indicated elsewhere the number of persons seeking to participate in these courses have been steadily increasing. It is certain that the increase in the number of sites within the UWIDITE System (from six in 1985 to thirteen at present) is one factor. However, the increasing interest shown by Labour Ministries and Departments, the trade unions and, to a lesser extent, employers' Associations is certainly an important cause of the rise in numbers. Further growth in the numbers can be expected since plans are afoot to increase the number of sites from the present thirteen to eighteen.

Experience has shown that it is quite feasible to draw on the expertise of persons outside the region in case of need. This was done in 1991 when a resource person from Canada was "bridged" into the UWIDITE facility and so was able to conduct a session from his office in Ottawa. In the same way a group of participants was "bridged" into the course conducted in 1992.

Although there are clear advantages in the use of this method of distance teaching, there are also certain associated technical difficulties. If for instance, there is a power outage in the city

where a site is located, then reception and transmission at that location will be disrupted. Fortunately, this is a very infrequent occurrence.

Again, sometimes transmission can be affected by "statics" and a deep "hum" may indicate the partial mal-functioning of the equipment at one of the sites. Experience has shown that these types of faults can usually be traced by the local Cable Company and eliminated. In an extreme case this could mean either that a particular site has to be neutralised or it has to be put on "receive" only. In the former case, participants would not be able to participate further in the session; in the latter case they would be able to hear the presentation and discussion but would be unable to take part as they would be unable to transmit. Persons "bridged" into the system from outside the region may experience some of these difficulties. So far sine 1985 only one session has had to be cancelled and re-scheduled because of technical difficulties.

In the Caribbean, Labour Inspectors administer laws relating to minimum rates of wages, hours of work and other terms and conditions of employment as well as laws setting standards relating to occupational safety and health. In a few countries, labour inspectors are usually concerned with one of the two sets of laws. In most of the countries there is little or no specialization and these inspectors often do not possess an engineering background. To some extent this mixture of background affects the level and contents of the training course. However, in practice, this has not so far been found to be a serious problem.

All in all, the Caribbean Labour Administration Centre is satisfied that this method of distance teaching commends itself as a means of promoting the professional development of labour administrators, particularly in the circumstances of the Caribbean region. Here, there are a number of small islands in most of which

the Labour Ministries/Departments are small, there is no great depth of alround knowledge of labour administration matters and staff turnover tend to be high so that the need for training becomes urgent and pressing in the face of rapidly changing technology and social conditions. Group training is the most practical and feasible but it can be quite expensive if the trainees are all to be brought together in all cases. A judicious mix of distance teaching and seminar/workshop activity is likely to be the most productive and economical.

It is not beyond the realm of possibilities that sometime in the future, perhaps in the near future, a degree level course designed especially for labour administrators and catering also to employers' and trade unions representatives, will be designed and offered by UWIDITE. This would greatly assist and actively promote the professionalisation of labour administration in the region. A start could perhaps be made with the one year full time Certificate Course in Labour Administration sponsored by CLAC at the University of the West Indies between 1985 and 1990 as a pilot project. A number of changes and modification would have to be made if this particular programme were to be adapted to distance teaching. Certainly, there are possibilities. What is required are the will, an innovative approach and of course, money.

October, 1992.